

Mr. Bhattarai (Nepal): First, I would like to compliment the President and his great country, Spain, for organizing this important debate on women and peace and security on the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000). I also want to thank the Secretary-General for his statement, and the briefers for their insights.

Nepal has been closely engaged in the Council's work on women and peace and security from its inception, and has remained true to its commitments to the cause, both at home and globally. Nepal has been implementing resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) through a dedicated national action plan and with appropriate mechanisms at the local, district, and national levels. As the first such effort in South Asia, our action plan was the product of a transparent, inclusive and nationwide consultations process. It is now a central instrument articulating the country's programmes on women and peace and security.

Nepal recognizes the close link between United Nations peacekeeping operations and resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent related resolutions. As a leading and consistent troop- and police-contributor, Nepal is committed to increasing the number of women in its army and police forces, deploying more women to peacekeeping, and integrating the protection of women and girls from sexual violence into predeployment training courses. The tools and training developed with the national action plan partners for the army, police and other Government stakeholders have proved useful. The security agencies are implementing a zero- tolerance policy against gender-based discrimination within their institutions, using tools such as gender-behaviour directives and directives regarding women in the military. We welcome the Secretary-General's zero- tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. It resonates with the action plan on gender-based violence that Nepal has been implementing since 2010.

Our Prime Minister's Office has a dedicated unit for addressing sexual and gender-based violence, which provides protection to victims and brings perpetrators to justice. In over 50 districts now, women and girls service centres investigate and address such incidents. The Gender Equality Act of 2006, together with the amendment of 56 laws identified as being gender- discriminatory, has expedited meaningful reforms in the country. Under our laws, sexual violence is a serious crime against human rights. Rape and violence against women are serious offenses against the State. Polygamy, child marriage, forced marriage, sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as sexual and domestic violence, are punishable by law. Nepal was careful to ensure that its peace process was gender- inclusive. Women comprised 33 per cent of district peace committees, set up to address local post-conflict issues by, inter alia, providing relief to victims of conflict. The current transitional justice mechanism investigates conflict-era cases and addresses the needs of the victims.

After eight years of consultations, an inclusive and democratic Constitution, written by elected representatives, was promulgated in Nepal last month. It has brought our home-grown peace process to its logical conclusion and has ushered in an era of promise for peace, progress and prosperity. The Constitution is extraordinarily progressive, especially in empowering women through representation. At least one third of the members of the federal Parliament must be women. No two persons of the same gender or community may, at any given time, occupy the elected offices of President and Vice-President. Similarly, the offices of either the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker of the Lower House and the Chair or the Vice-Chair of the Upper House must be held by women. That spirit, which is reflected in the Constitution, will be instrumental in our efforts to undertake further steps towards the greater empowerment and participation of women. The Constitution has institutionalized many of our achievements in the past and inspires many more.

Much still remains to be done, though. Despite formidable challenges, including the devastation caused by earthquakes earlier this year, we are committed to integrating the national action plan into our mainstream development plan, in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We also want to further localize the action plan for the benefit of the people on the ground. Likewise, we are committed to ensuring that all victims of sexual violence have access to justice as well as to relief benefits and support services. We also want to emphasize gender mainstreaming in our recovery, relief and rehabilitation efforts so as to align the implementation of national action plans with the gender-specific recommendations of the various treaty bodies and mechanisms and to engage more men and boys in our campaign to oppose violence against women at all times.

To conclude, in Nepal we are convinced that much can be accomplished with our own efforts and with the support of the international community. With sustained and enhanced levels of joint funding and other means of implementation in place, Nepal will continue to make meaningful progress.